

EXCLUSIVE: Grammy Nominee Tauren Wells Talks Power of Prayer, Baptism in the Spirit, Israel Houghton

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Tauren Wells is a Dove award-winning and Grammy-nominated Spirit-filled artist. His songs “Known” and “When We Pray” have dominated Christian radio in the last year.

At the time of our interview, you’ve had a pretty special month of October. Can you tell us a little bit about your Dove Awards?

So I apparently won four Dove Awards. I got one for Pop Contemporary Christian Album, Pop Contemporary Christian Artist, Hip Hop Recorded Song of the Year, and New Artist of the Year. So it’s very exciting, [and] really, really cool to be celebrated among all my peers. And it was a lot of fun.

Can you tell me a little bit about your testimony and how you first came to know the Lord?

Yeah, I started going to church when I was 10 years old. My dad kind of made the decision for our family that we were going to start going, which was a fantastic decision. We started going, and I went to a church camp one summer, got baptized in the Holy Spirit. I got baptized when we got back home. That was really it for me. I found a place I really

belonged at the church, and I had a lot of opportunity to grow and discover who I really was in Christ. And that is what has kind of led me in a long path to where I am now.

You got baptized in the Spirit at 10 years old?

Yeah. That was how we did it. I grew up Pentecostal, so we just went down to the altar at church camp and prayed. It was amazing. That's like a normal thing that would happen all throughout my life.

I get that. I went to church camp beginning when I was 8, because I was also raised in a charismatic church. I had never seen it before, though. Like, "What is happening and why is everyone around me doing this?"

Yeah. But you're also interested as well. I think that's part of the wonder of it.

Did you have any experience that you remember during that time? Did the Lord speak to your heart or give you any special gifts?

I don't think so at the moment. I know that that same year was the first year I got a solo at camp. So those experiences happened simultaneously.

How did you really start your music career and kind of get involved with the Christian music circuit?

Well, I started singing in church and stuff, and then when I was 17, I started leading worship. My uncle, who was also my youth pastor, was like, "OK, if you're going to lead worship, you need to know how to play an instrument." So I started playing piano and started playing guitar. That's how I got started leading worship and really grew during that time as well.

In 2011, Royal Taylor put out their first CD. Tell me a little bit about your time with the band.

Well, that was one of the greatest times of my life. We started our band in college and wanted to continue touring. We

toured in a choir in a small vocal group. And we didn't really have any context for real touring. So like with venues and promoters—we barely knew that stuff existed. What we did know was that we could go to different churches and be able to sleep on their couches, playing their Sunday-morning worship services, so that's how we started. And then we ended up getting signed and put out a couple albums.

Recently, you've been going solo. You've put out some incredible singles. What has that journey been like?

It's been amazing. I really think it was the right time and the right move for me and my family. I'm married. I've got three little boys. I wanted to be able to have more say over my schedule and how I spent my time. So being a solo artist kind of liberated me, in that sense, to create my own world. So I'm loving it. The songs are connecting with so many people, and it's been amazing to be a part of.

I personally like your song "When We Pray." Can you tell me a little bit about the inspiration behind that song?

You know, we are looking in this day and age for so many different ways to impact the world and culture and our country and some of the things happening. We want to change the world through social media with 280 characters or with a Facebook status. But real change happens when the church prays. So I wanted to write an uplifting anthem that would encourage people to access our greatest strength and power. And that is the strength and power of God, activated through prayer.

Tell me a little bit about your songwriting process, how you work with the Holy Spirit, and just listen to Him and let Him guide you.

The whole process is just me kind of excavating, trying to dig deep and figure out what messages God is speaking to me, and how am I learning and how am I growing, and then I place that in the context of a song and see if it happens to connect with other people. And it has been. I think that's the power of writing honestly, and being honest in your creativity, because

ultimately, that creativity isn't a distraction from God. It's an expression of Him. And God uses that to connect people to His glory.

Besides music, what else are you focused on right now?

Family is my biggest focus. Like I said, I've got my beautiful wife Lorna and three little boys that are 5 and 2 [years old] and 10 months old. So that's really the focus and trying to maintain the right rhythm with them, and with ministry and all that.

So your boys are really little right now. I'm sure you're taking them to church and teaching them so much. How are you teaching them about the Holy Spirit and how to communicate with God?

We're teaching them primarily that it starts at home. We are grateful for our church. We love our church. But we really feel like it's easy to use the church as a crutch. That faith happens first in the home. So we'll get around together, we'll sing worship songs, we'll read the Bible, we'll pray and just try to show them that this is a part of everyday life.

We need so much more of that. Especially when you hear so many statistics of kids who go off to college and lose their faith, even after growing up in good Christian homes.

Right. There has to be a demonstration of that [Christian lifestyle] in front of them. And honestly, the younger your kids are, the more in control you think you are. So as they get older, we will learn a lot. I think there are many instances where there was authentic faith models in the home, and then kids just make different choices. But we hold on to the promise that if we raise our children in the way they should go, when they're old, they won't depart from it. And that's kind of the hope that we cling to.

Given your recent Dove awards, your Grammy nominations, who are some artists that you grew up listening to whom you really respect?

On a musical level, I respect Michael Jackson, people like that—Prince. So many different folks that I grew up listening to. And then once we started going to church, we listened to a lot of Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond and Israel Houghton. And then later I discovered Hillsong. That kind of blew my mind when I was in college. So I've had a lot of different musical influences over the course of my life. There are different things that I take away from different artists, different albums, that definitely inspire what we're currently doing.

Can you tell me a little bit about some of those takeaways right now?

Yeah. So like, with Israel Houghton, I feel like he did such an amazing job bridging the gap between the black church and the white church, if we're just going to keep it 100. I think that Sunday is a segregated day in America, primarily in churches. And Israel created music that bridged the gap. He and his team, Aaron Lindsey and New Breed. So that was something that I wanted to incorporate in my music is music that would bring people together from different cultures, different backgrounds, different ethnicities, all having something that they are passionate about it and enjoy. So that was one of the takeaways from my black gospel roots. I just love kind of the jazz influence that is in black gospel. You don't hear it as much on my albums, but if you come and experience one of my live shows, you'll definitely hear that influence as well. And then I love the accessibility of modern worship, how things are said in a new way, in a fresh way. But we're just saying the same things, trying to figure out how we wrap words around this amazing God and this big, big grace that we get to receive freely. That inspires me as well.

So what is something that the Holy Spirit has really been working with you through right now?

That image is overrated. I think that's the biggest thing. There's a lot that accompanies significance and success, people looking at you and creating whatever type of image that

they would want to see you as, and I'm learning that what I am known for is not as important as who I am known by. The fact that God knows me, loves me, sees me before I ever had a record deal, ever had any awards, ever had a wife or kids. I was still His child and valuable, and that's the truth that I have to keep coming back to day after day, because it's easy to get lost, even in the midst of good things, and forget the best thing, which is that I am known and loved by the Creator of the world.

What do you have next on your plate? What's coming up in your life?

I'm getting ready to jump on tour with Chris Tomlin, which I'm super pumped about. That starts next spring, the Holy Roar tour, and it is going to be amazing. Myself, Chris Tomlin, Pat Barrett, so I'm getting excited about that.

What is it like just going on tour with these big artists and being like, "Wow, how did I get here?"

I love just seeing how they acclimate. Everyone is so unique. Their gifts are unique. And I love learning and studying them and seeing how they handle people; how they handle different situations; how they're approaching their ministry, family, music career. There's just so much to be learned, you know, from some of these guys, so I love getting around them and sharing life and hearing from their perspective.

Who is the person who has kind of surprised you the most when you've met them?

Oh, man, everyone has been really cool. You know, a lot of people say, don't meet your heroes. There's only a few people that I've met where I was like, "Aww, man, I wish I wouldn't have met you. You ruined it." For the most part, I have been pleasantly surprised with so many people that I look up to, who are rooting me on and just genuine people. It's been really cool. It reminds me that good people actually make it and that usually the more successful you are and secure in your identity, the more gracious you are to the people around

you. And I hope that that is true of my life as well.

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